

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*St. Paul's Distinct Leadership Tradition*

**A Century of The Sterling Club**

JEREMIAH E. ELLIS, PAGE 11



*William DeWitt Mitchell*

**The Other William Mitchell**

THOMAS H. BOYD AND DOUGLAS R. HEIDENREICH, PAGE 1

## Over The Years ...

### A century of notable leaders:

#### *Sterling Club members you've read about:*

- Lawyer and US Minister and Consul to Liberia William T. Francis
- Deputy Police Chief James S. Griffin
- Athlete and Sports Official Jimmy Lee
- Architect Clarence "Cap" Wigington

#### *Sterling Club members you've heard of:*

- Union Leader Frank Boyd
- Judge Stephen L. Maxwell
- Publisher Cecil Newman

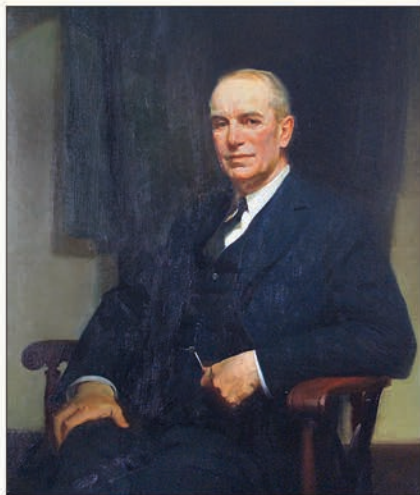
#### *Sterling Club members you've met:*

- Former Police Chief William Finney
- Former School Superintendent Curman Gaines
- Former City Council President Bill Wilson

SOURCE: The Sterling Club Archives

One hundred years ago, thirteen talented gentlemen in St. Paul's African American community formed a social club to gather, celebrate, and stand strong against discrimination. Jeremiah E. Ellis shares this organization's long journey of engaging in civic action, creating social cohesion, managing through community upheaval, and acknowledging achievements in *St. Paul's Distinct Leadership Tradition: A Century of The Sterling Club*, beginning on page 11.

### ON THE COVER



William DeWitt Mitchell served as the fifty-fourth Attorney General of the United States from 1929 to 1933. Danish artist John C. Johansen was commissioned to paint a portrait of Mitchell for the Department of Justice in 1935. He also painted likenesses of Georges Clemenceau, Ferdinand Foch, Herbert Hoover, Woodrow Wilson, and others. *Painting by John C. Johansen. Courtesy of United States Department of Justice.*

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JOHANNES ALLERT, M.A.

## Message from the Editorial Board

One of the joys of publishing local history is uncovering stories that have escaped previous notice from historians. We have three of those stories this month. Thomas H. Boyd and Douglas R. Heidenreich explore the life of attorney William DeWitt Mitchell, the son of legendary Minnesota Supreme Court Justice William Bell Mitchell. The "Other William Mitchell" had a distinguished career in his own right as solicitor general and attorney general in Washington, D.C., and this article gives him well-deserved recognition. Jeremiah E. Ellis brings us the history of the Sterling Club, which was formed by a select group of men from St. Paul's African American community. For a century, the club has celebrated important milestones of community members and advanced civil rights as it provided a haven from pervasive discrimination in the city. Finally, Johannes Allert depicts the life of Ruth Cutler through her journals and letters. Cutler, a young woman born into upper-class St. Paul society, committed to Progressive ideals during World War I. Despite family responsibilities, she managed to join the American Red Cross and travel to France before she tragically lost her life in the flu epidemic. These stories remind us of individual lives and collective actions that showed incredible talent and resolve.

Anne Cowie  
Chair, Editorial Board

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*“I’m As Restless As A Lion.”*

## The Aspirations of St. Paulite Ruth Cutler

JOHANNES ALLERT, M.A.

There were several facets to Ruth Cutler—writer, artist, suffragette, even mariner. But above all, she was a Progressive-Humanitarian.<sup>1</sup> Motivated by the desire to serve, Ruth had no inkling that her destiny would place her so near to her goal of helping abroad in the American Red Cross only to have it end in tragedy. Never-

theless, her legacy that passed through generations was not framed as that of a victim. Instead, she was remembered as a heroic champion, motivated by the pervasive ideals of the Progressive movement and nobly sacrificed on behalf of the Great War. Although she was not an integral part of the vanguard of change, her experiences recorded in her diaries, journals, and correspondence illuminate the upheavals of the war and its impact upon a society of a bygone era.

The baby of the family, little Ruth Cutler may have gotten away with more than her older siblings, as her father was prone to let her do as she pleased. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*



### Let Ruth Be Ruth

Ruth Cutler entered the world on August 12, 1890, the youngest of seven born to Edward Hutchins Cutler and Lucy Carter Dunbar Cutler, a prosperous couple with Massachusetts roots.<sup>2</sup> Residing at 360 Summit Avenue, the Cutlers were charter members of the nearby Swedenborgian Church,<sup>3</sup> a denomination that emphasized ‘works’ over ‘faith’—teachings that shaped Ruth’s worldview from an early age.<sup>4</sup>

Images of young Ruth reveal a girl with gentle blue eyes, soft features, and a head of long, wavy, strawberry-blonde hair. Often, her reserved appearance belied her lighter side. Likewise, her father Edward cast a similar persona except when photographed alongside Ruth, where he appears to dote on her in a grandfatherly manner. The pictures, along with their father/daughter interactions chronicled in the family archives, reveal that Edward, though conservative, believed in letting Ruth be Ruth.<sup>5</sup>

As a young woman, Ruth adhered to Wilsonian Progressivism, but unlike her idol, President Woodrow Wilson, she believed in women’s suffrage. However, she did not fit the stereotype of the more radical, outspoken suffragist but held more centrist views concerning economic independence.<sup>6</sup> Although a self-described jack of all trades, Ruth often grappled with her more reticent nature that sometimes interfered with her altruistic desires.<sup>7</sup>



This photograph of the family home at 360 Summit Avenue was taken around the turn of the twentieth century. The house was eventually razed. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

She also loved the sea and frequently spent summers in Massachusetts at “blessed Chatham.”<sup>8</sup> Walmere, the family’s Cape Cod vacation home, served as Ruth’s refuge. She spent endless hours sailing nearby.<sup>9</sup>

Entering Vassar College<sup>10</sup> in Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1908, became a defining moment in Ruth’s life. She delighted in its education model that reflected the Progressive movement’s influence in the new century. Blending traditional Judeo-Christian precepts with modern science, the school mirrored society’s desire to improve the human condition. Ruth valued instructors who were passionate in their craft as exemplified by one asserting the Progressive movement’s supreme ability to solve the multitude of society’s problems. Core to progressivism was the need for self-improvement that one professor believed was “the homework of society.”<sup>11</sup> Conversely, Ruth held little regard for instructors lacking in talent or passion for their craft, sarcastically writing that one “. . . speaks as though she were afraid the Lord was going to interrupt her,”<sup>12</sup> and another had “. . . lavender water in her veins instead of blood.”<sup>13</sup>

Vassar required that all students attend church, and it was during her freshman year that questions concerning God and a distant afterlife were answered.

“. . . I have heard a sermon I liked as well as any I have ever heard before. It was by Lyman Abbott and his text was ‘If a man dies, can he live again?’ and his answer was ‘He that liveth and believeth in the One shall never die.’ He showed us how death and the resurrection were the same thing. How when a man died, he did not go to some far-off land but was near in spirit to those whom he loved and who loved him.”<sup>14,15</sup>

The lesson remained fixed in her heart and later served as a comfort during moments of personal loss. Often, she spent time in quiet reflection in the campus chapel, listening to organ music:

“I love to listen to it—in the winter time when the chapel is dark and only the organ loft is lighted; in the springtime when the rays of the sinking sun are still more



From a young age, Ruth Cutler was a voracious reader and a disciplined writer who fastidiously logged her daily activities in her ‘Line a Day’ diaries and saved the more descriptive events for her journals. She also was a talented artist with an eye for detail.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Ruth enjoyed sculpting, painting, and drawing. She drew “A Snow Storm” at age seventeen in 1908. Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.

subdued after passing through the great stained-glass windows; when too, one can see in particular the lovely windows behind the organ—an angel with arched wings standing erect, and her face full of beauty.”<sup>16</sup>

Affectionately nicknamed ‘Rufus’ by her classmates, Ruth forged friendships with class president Elinor ‘Prud’ Prudden from Boston, Margaret ‘Tibbs’ Tibbits from Wallingford, Connecticut, and her closest friend Helen Jackson from Colorado Springs. Ruth often referred to Helen as ‘H.J’ or ‘Jack’ in her diaries and journals, as she chronicled their frequent moments together.<sup>17</sup>

The summer cottage in Chatham, Massachusetts, served as a welcome retreat for the St. Paul Cutlers. In naming the home and a boat, Edward and Lucy Cutler used each of their children’s initials, creating “Walmere”—William, Amelia, Lucia, Mary, Elinor, Ruth, Emily (not in sequential order). Photograph from the Cutler Family Collection. Courtesy of Pam Fricke.





Ruth Cutler (top) formed special friendships with three Vassar classmates, including Helen Jackson (center), Elinor Prudden (bottom), and Margaret Tibbits (not pictured). Courtesy of Vassar College Archives.

Graduating in 1912, Ruth received recognition as chair of the college’s Goodfellowship Club,<sup>19</sup> for her management of a local Hostess House,<sup>20</sup> and to her parents’ surprise, she also made the Dean’s List.<sup>21</sup> She was the first woman in her family to enter the professional workforce, but the path was challenging, even for a woman of privilege.

Ruth demonstrated a knack for organization and was attentive to detail, but her limited interactions with immigrants suggests a patronizing attitude. Moreover, a visit to the Neighborhood House on the city’s then West Side highlighted her initial inexperience and the chasm between wealthy and poor. “I know the ‘slums’ were there,” she exclaimed, “but I never appreciated that there was quite such squalor in S.P. [St. Paul] before. Ramshackle yards and houses, bad smells and filth.”<sup>22</sup>

But a temporary assignment in Boston’s Italian district in 1914 first raised her awareness of conflicts abroad. She noted the high unemployment along the docks and influx of displaced Syrian refugees “owing to the war.”<sup>23</sup> While there, Ruth attended a ‘Peace Sunday’ at the Church on the Hill on October 14 and listened to the minister’s rejection of “conventional prayers for cessation of European warfare,” labeling them as “futile,” whereas “. . . actual efforts to make our own individual lives good, were on the other hand, certain to bring about peace ‘not as the world giveth.’”<sup>24</sup>

Returning to St. Paul that month, Ruth accepted a position with United Charities as an assistant general secretary, but turmoil arose between the agency and Louis W. Hill, whose traditional notions of charity clashed with the agency’s progressive ideology. Hill objected to the idea of women in the workplace, particularly the daughter of a wealthy man.<sup>25</sup> Just over a year later, Ruth, grappling with her mother’s new cancer diagnosis and fed up with the ongoing drama between Hill and United Charities, resigned.<sup>26</sup>

### Is the War and Rumor of War Ominous?

During her mother’s periods of remission, Ruth attended lectures. In February 1916, a series of programs generated within Ruth an interest to serve the Allied cause overseas. She inquired about volunteer opportunities but discovered only experienced nurses were eligible. However,

she learned the situation might change and was provided a contact in Paris. Ruth lamented, “If only I could find my way clear of going.”<sup>27</sup>

It was a Saturday matinee, *The Battle Cry of Peace*, that really made Ruth think—“a rousing movie intended to steer Americans to recognize the need to prepare immediately against war, not ‘for’ war.” Its plot involved subterfuge against an unprepared and seemingly indifferent America by an enemy closely resembling Germany, in which “whole families were blotted out [by] cruelty.” Afterward, the audience viewed a slideshow revealing the country’s vulnerabilities. “. . . [I]t shook our faith in peace propaganda even though we believe in peace as the perfect ideal.”<sup>28</sup> Returning home, Ruth learned of further Allied setbacks. “It made our hearts sink.” She wrote, “Can barbarism win after all? Right must win over might eventually. I can see no other outcome, but in the interval brute force can do a great deal of harm and seems to hold sway.” Noting the increased presence of National Guard troops drilling at nearby Ft. Snelling, she mused:

“Is this war and rumor of war ominous? Does the “movie” we saw this afternoon mean something? Is it more than an advertisement for munition makers? At least it is a new medium for stirring the country and a powerful one. I rather think we should heed it. But it is surprising to see the reluctance of people to open their eyes to disagreeable things.”<sup>29</sup>

### France is as Far Away as Mars

Because of her mother’s illness, Ruth waited months before proposing the idea of overseas service. Surprisingly, her mother approved:

“This is a red-letter day in my career, I have broached the subject of going to France—and received encouragement from mother. She is always ready with it. The idea of going has been struggling to come to the front. Many a time I think I’ve silenced it—that duty [to family] ought to make me kill it entirely. But it hasn’t been killed. Now I am in the prime of my life wanting to go with double purpose—to help and be revitalized.”<sup>30</sup>

Fretting over the time spent in idleness, Ruth sought renewal and purpose. “It’s time I worked, time I give myself to the full.” But plans were delayed when her mother reentered the hospital. “It was a blow—the need for it, as well as the suffering again.”<sup>31</sup> On November 26, 1916, any hope of her mother’s recovery, let alone Ruth’s dream of service overseas, were scotched:

“France is as far away as Mars. My staying or going is no longer a matter of duty—but my going is an impossibility after what mother has just been through in Chicago—X-ray and radium treatments given by Dr. Schultz. We can hope that even if a cure is beyond expectation, he can allay suffering.”<sup>32</sup>

By Christmastime, Ruth sensed that the family lived “. . . under high tension for fear of bringing on dire catastrophe, while mother’s senses are numbed and stupefied. We open presents reluctantly, and the day, which was once so glad and joyous, is now dread.”

### **Before It’s Over We Shall Have to Go Through Fire and Water**

As 1917 dawned and President Wilson’s fight to keep America out of war became more untenable, so too was Lucy Cutler’s battle against cancer. While chronicling her mother’s declining health, Ruth kept abreast of the war news and America’s gradual shift toward intervention. Following the resumption of Germany’s submarine campaign against all shipping bound for the Allies and the revelation of the infamous ‘Zimmermann Telegram,’ Wilson had no choice but to ask Congress for a declaration of war against the Central Powers. Ruth wrote, “Congress declared war with Wilson signing it on April 7 [sic].”<sup>33,34</sup>

Ruth assumed limited American intervention was required, asserting, “Our mission is to feed the Allies, finance them, keep patrols of the seas and possibly send a detachment to the trenches in France.”<sup>35</sup> However, Germany’s spring offensive in the West combined with its naval war against Allied shipping and Communist upheaval in Russia scattered any illusions of a quick victory. Ruth realized, “. . . we are just waking up to the fact that not only are we involved at war but that democracy itself is at stake.” She concluded,

“. . . before it’s over we shall have to go through fire and water and make sacrifices which [until] now seemed unbelievable—that democracy and freedom may not ‘perish from the earth.’”<sup>36</sup>

Fortunately by the summer of 1917, the Allies successfully turned the tide just as the United States Army began arriving in force.<sup>37</sup> That fall at Fort Snelling,<sup>38</sup> Ruth toured the labyrinth of trench works, confessing, “Selfishly, I gave thanks that the war was not here upon us, but I regretted more than once I am not a man. Such is my ceaseless vain regret; I must strive to do my utmost with ‘the Army at home.’”<sup>39</sup> But aside from generous donations to humanitarian causes, what else could she do while her mother was ill?<sup>40</sup>

### **She Woke Up Well**

In early April, her mother’s struggle with cancer ended.

“She wandered a little toward the last, but before that, looked deep into my eyes and heart one day and said, ‘Dear, dear darling, how I love you.’ She went, at last, unconsciously at 1:30 on Tuesday morning April 9—just 8 years from the very day Grandmother Dunbar died. I was sitting up with her and I noticed a change coming and called for the others. Her dream had come true at last—she woke up well.”<sup>41</sup>

A month later, freed from stress or family obligations, Ruth proclaimed:

“Today [May 6, 1918] I have taken a turn in the road which is bound to be a great moment to me all the rest of my life. I have registered for nurse’s training at the University [Minnesota] Hospital. Perhaps it is a start to a greater moment. There are many a one we take each and every day, little realizing what hangs on the choice we unconsciously take—this in preference to that. When we are asked to do not our “bit” but our “all”—I could do not less than all I have done.”<sup>42</sup>

She was admitted into the nursing program with classes scheduled for fall. The interlude provided a much-needed break in Chatham.

## A Slice of War Sandwiched in Between the Peace

Ruth welcomed the chance to spend time far away from anything related to illness or war. Yet the war found her. First, came news of the death of Helen Jackson's brother, Lieutenant Roland Jackson, killed in action on June 6, 1918, at Chateau Thierry. Responding to Helen's loss, Ruth wrote:

"There is a glory about it spiritually of which you must be proud—you who loved him so dearly. Some [times?] I think you are not so sure about the life he has gone to as I am. That is the reality I no longer question. Could spirits such as Roland's and others be extinguished by the death of their bodies? R[oland] was in the prime of his life. That's what makes it so especially hard for those he left behind. You must be at peace for him and yet."<sup>43</sup>

The second event occurred Sunday July 21, 1918. As Ruth returned from a morning sail, she learned that a German U-Boat (U-156) had surfaced at Nauset Beach and attacked the tugboat *Perth Amboy* carrying passengers and towing empty barges. Ruth arrived at the scene just as seaplanes from nearby Chatham Naval Air Station counterattacked. Despite several attempts, their ordnance failed to explode.<sup>44</sup> Wisely, the sub's captain, Richard Feldt, withdrew and headed for deep water, thus marking Germany's only direct attack against America.<sup>45</sup> Although the local populace was shaken, no serious damage or fatalities were reported—miraculous, considering U-165's crew fired nearly 150 rounds.

Ruth considered the episode surreal. "Are we dreaming? For Sunday seemed like one long dream from beginning to end, with a slice of war sandwiched in between the peace." The event served as a wake-up call and "... brought the war close to home and made skeptics sit up and take notice. People here who didn't know there was a war on last summer are quite rampant about it now."<sup>46</sup>

On August 22, 1918, Ruth received a visit from another 'rampant' individual, her friend Elinor Prudden, who insisted Ruth join her in America's largest humanitarian relief organization—the American Red Cross.

## I'm as Restless as a Lion

From Ruth's perspective, the Red Cross represented the best attributes of the nation—exceptionalism, patriotism, and humanitarianism. Elinor informed Ruth that the heightened war demand for women resulted in the organization's decision to revoke its "Sister Clause" and lower the minimum age from thirty to twenty-five (Ruth was twenty-eight). More importantly, under the organization's auspices, a Vassar unit was operating overseas. Ruth accompanied Elinor to Boston's Red Cross headquarters to learn more.

"... in France one is nearer to the center of the biggest event in history and until one has been there, how can one discuss the issues except theoretically, or how can one understand with any degree of real insight? Until one has shared a common danger, one is unqualified to judge. That is what appeals to me especially—that by going one gets out of this safe existence over here and takes a chance along with the others who are doing their all."<sup>47</sup>

The pair encountered a mixture of bureaucracy and indifference. Red Cross officials suggested the two wire the Vassar unit directly, which they did. The unit responded: "Still a chance for you in the unit."

Writing to her elder sister Mary shortly thereafter, Ruth exclaimed, "I am to be engaged to—the Red Cross!" Ruth implored Mary to remain quiet until she knew for certain. She shared plans to submit a passport application and "scrub up" on her French, closing with, "In the meantime, I'm as restless as a lion."<sup>48</sup>

But as the summer concluded, Ruth's reticent nature emerged. Having misplaced the application, she admitted, "I do want to go—but my eagerness is dulled a good deal by what it means to father and Amelia." Ruth continued:

"The risk of going—the mere physical risk both in crossing and in being behind the firing line in the devastated regions—should I go—does not concern me. I would be willing to give up my life if necessary for a cause which has already claimed millions. But somehow it is the thought of

those I would leave behind that makes the thought of leaving hard.”<sup>49</sup>

Time slipped by, and the bureaucratic inertia tested Ruth’s patience. Adding to the delay were the quarantines and travel restrictions imposed because of the influenza pandemic. Instead of moving forward with travel plans, the Minnesota Red Cross assigned Ruth the menial task of sorting donated clothing for the victims of the Cloquet and Moose Lake fires.<sup>50</sup>

A week and a half later, at 2:45 a.m. on November 11, 1918, Ruth awoke to the sounds of “an orchestra of whistles and horns, and drums, and giant fireworks.” The war was finally over, leaving her to wax philosophically, “As for myself, I would not have the war continue for another minute longer than necessary, but I am frankly disappointed to have missed getting ‘over there’ before it stopped.”<sup>51</sup>

The following evening, the Cutlers piled into the family car and traveled up Summit Avenue to the House of Hope Presbyterian Church, where they watched the outdoor religious service<sup>52</sup> from afar. The image of the lighted cathedral tower looming over the large crowd as they sang hymns and held the star-spangled banner in their midst, impressed Ruth. She appreciated the solemnity of the moment.<sup>53</sup>

### **Are You Missing the Socialist–Anarchist–Suffragist–Bolshevik from Your Midst?**

Although the war against Germany was over, Ruth remained confident her talents were still needed in building a better peace. The Red Cross confirmed her hopes in a telegram, instructing her to report for duty. She gathered her belongings, including her new Corona typewriter nicknamed ‘Peggy,’ and embarked upon her journey to France and self-fulfillment.<sup>54</sup>

Her travels east were marked by letters home to her father. Passing through Toledo on November 19, she jokingly quipped “Are you missing the socialist-anarchist-suffragist-IWW Bolshevik from your midst? Life must be already tame with the thorn removed. Can a thorn be spanked? Because I’m missing you lots already.”<sup>55</sup> Thanking her father for the gift of the typewriter, she admitted, “I sometimes think if you had kicked me out of the house it would



This passport photo taken by Haynes Photography in St. Paul prior to her trip to Paris is the last known image of Ruth Cutler. Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.

have been easier going, but just the same, I’m glad you didn’t. Will try to post this from Cleveland. Lots of love to you all.” Recalling a wager she’d made with her father before leaving, she added “P.S. Daddy, I asked the conductor where the time changes. You won’t believe me, but he said Buffalo. (\$5 please!)”<sup>56</sup>

Arriving in Boston on November 21, Ruth recounted an enjoyable evening consuming oysters on the half shell with her sister Elinor but noted with concern Elinor’s slow recovery from influenza.<sup>57</sup> The next day, Ruth joined her classmate Elinor Prudden aboard the ship *Melita*. The sendoff became a Vassar class reunion for the pair, as friends Margaret Tibbets and Helen Jackson arrived to wish them *bon voyage*.<sup>58</sup>

At sea, Ruth put ‘Peggy’ to good use, compiling reports requested by her co-workers. Apart from the “boring” and “officious” YMCA staff, Ruth considered the rest of the ship’s company delightful.<sup>59</sup> But the arrival in Liverpool, England, on December 2, 1918, became another lesson in perseverance. The two-day layover lasted a week, resulting in frustration and uncertainty. Ruth stated they “lived in terror of being sent back to the USA.”<sup>60</sup> On December 10, 1918, Ruth gleefully wrote they were finally bound for France, exclaiming, “Well, virtue sometimes has its reward after all.”<sup>61</sup> But this reward came with a price. While waiting in England, Ruth caught a cold.



### Her Service Star Gleams Golden Now

Despite the date—Friday, December 13, 1918—Ruth considered her arrival in Paris the day before President Wilson’s celebrated appearance fortunate. Yet the constant travel, foreign environments, and the late nights with little sleep combined with the damp weather, took a toll on Ruth’s immune system and drained her of energy, leaving her health compromised.

Despite her worsening cold, Ruth remained determined to witness Wilson’s triumphal arrival and join in the festivities on Saturday, December 14. Ruth caught a brief glimpse of President Wilson and General John J. Pershing as they passed in their motorcade. She exclaimed, “. . . think of telling your grandnieces that you were in Paris the day Wilson made his triumphal entry.”<sup>62</sup> Continuing her letter the following evening, she stated that she and Elinor planned to make further inquiries on Monday (December 16) regarding prospects within the Vassar unit and closed with her usual, “Love to all RC.”<sup>63</sup>

Tragically, those prospects never materialized. Instead, she was admitted to hospital in Paris as an influenza patient. One week later, with Elinor by her bed, Ruth quietly slipped

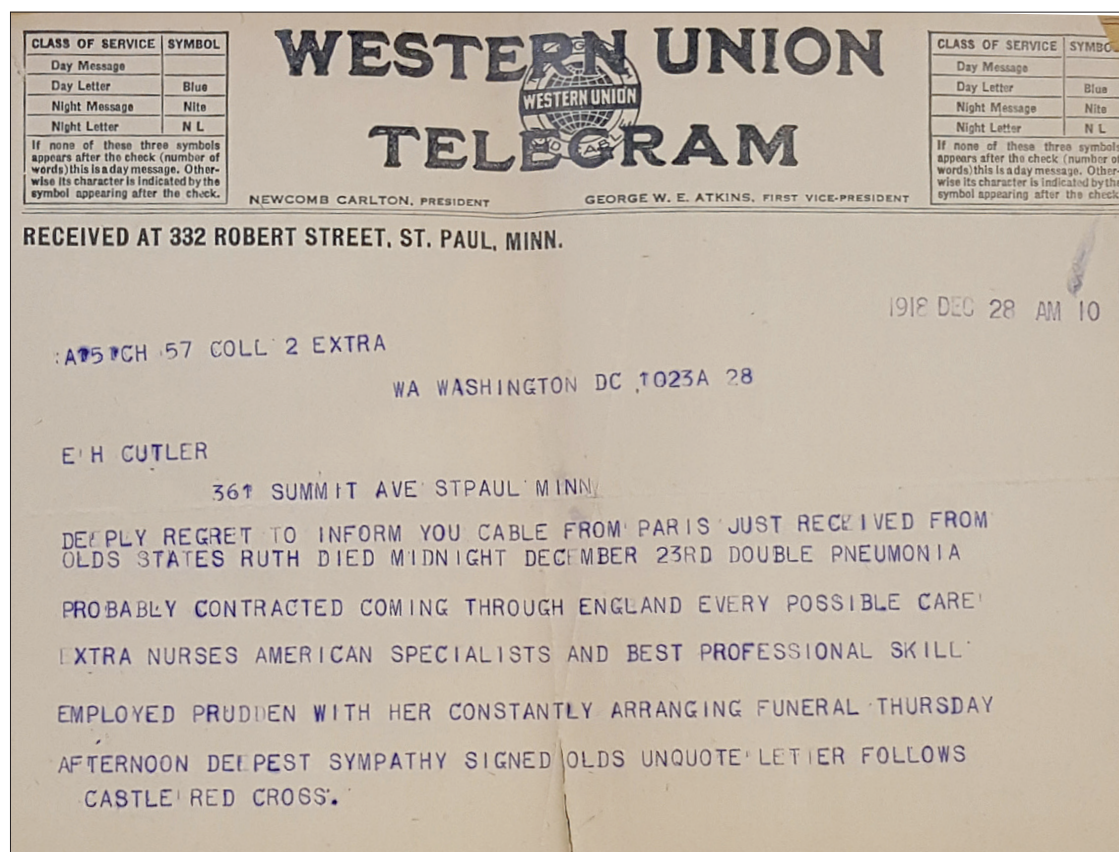
away on the morning of December 23, 1918—it was Elinor’s birthday.

News of Ruth’s death sent shockwaves through her network of colleagues, friends, and relatives. Yet their condolences did little to assuage Edward’s grief, now exacerbated by endless delays in having Ruth’s body brought home. The seeming indifference toward petitions filed by the Red Cross and Minnesota State Senator Frank B. Kellogg resulted in disparaging remarks against the US Army; but France had the final say in the disposition of the dead. Until the French officials declared otherwise, the dead, including Ruth, would remain in France.<sup>64</sup>

In the interim, numerous tributes and memorials honoring her sacrifice followed. Headlining her death, “HER SERVICE STAR GLEAMS GOLDEN NOW,” United Charities framed her loss as a “supreme sacrifice” and revealed that Ruth frequently donated anonymously to several needy families.<sup>65</sup>

The following summer, the Cutlers traveled to Poughkeepsie for a Vassar memorial honoring Ruth and two others who died while serving. Later that year, Ruth’s estate established the Ruth Cutler Fund to assist the school’s

Five days after her death, the Cutler family received the unexpected and unwanted news via telegram. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*



employees financially during times of crisis. Additional funds financed the construction of a campus recreation hall in her memory.<sup>66</sup>

By year's end 1919, Ruth's remains finally arrived in St. Paul and following a private service, were cremated and interred in the city's Oakland Cemetery on January 7, 1920.<sup>67</sup> Ruth's family marker reads, "Died in Service of American Red Cross, Paris, France."

In 1922, the Swedenborgian Church dedicated a new addition courtesy of Edward Cutler to the memory of his daughter Ruth and his wife, Lucy.<sup>68</sup> Honors were bestowed by Ramsey County in 1936 during a dedication ceremony of its war memorial inside the county courthouse. Ruth's name is included there on a list of the fallen of the Great War.<sup>69</sup>

Apart from the tributes and memorials is the remarkable collection of Ruth's personal artifacts, lovingly preserved and passed down through the generations.<sup>70</sup> Among the items is a tiny booklet Ruth labeled "Recipes and Miscellaneous Writings." Within its pages is a line from the book *Eve Dorme: The Story of Her Precarious Youth*. Authored by Emily Vielé Strother and published in 1915, the quotation embodies Ruth's enduring spirit:

"Best there is never any real parting between those who love—no forgetting of people who are always in our hearts. When



This image of Ruth Cutler on a small sailboat at Cape Cod in 1912 captures a peaceful moment when the young woman could take a breath and relish the calm of the sea she loved so much. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

we think of them, we live ever the happy days which we spent together until kind fate brings back again more of such days to live and remember."<sup>71</sup>

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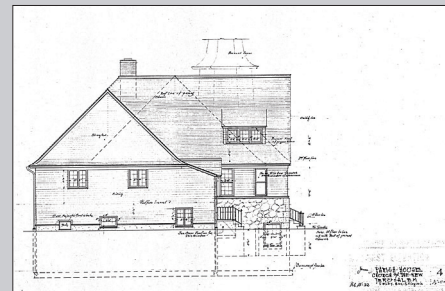
The American Red Cross posthumously awarded Ruth Cutler their service medal. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

### St. Paul's Swedenborgian Church

Designed by renowned architect Cass Gilbert and completed in 1887, the Swedenborgian Church, once known as the Church of the New Jerusalem and as the Virginia Street Church today, has existed for 133 years. Edward Cutler and family were charter members. According to family lore, the church's simple, yet appealing, design stood in stark contrast to "the thunder down the street," a veiled critique toward the Cathedral of St. Paul (which opened in 1915).<sup>a</sup>

The Swedenborgians, a Christian denomination, follow the precepts of their eighteenth-century founder, Emanuel Swedenborg. A scientist turned theologian, Swedenborg urged his followers to seek the inner meanings layered within the scriptures and apply them to their daily lives so that they may aspire to a greater purpose. Above all, doctrine difference remains subordinate to Christian charity. Visitors are openly welcomed, as "all religion relates to life."<sup>b</sup>

A parish house funded by Edward Cutler was added to the back of the church in 1922 and dedicated to the memory of Cutler's wife, Lucy, and his daughter, Ruth.<sup>c</sup> When entering the church from Selby Avenue, visitors find a portrait of Cutler hanging alongside pictures of the many ministers who served the church. While not clergy, Cutler's image in this place of prominence is a testament to his influence and involvement there.



This 1922 drawing shows the east elevation (or back end) of the church parish house that was funded by parishioner Edward Cutler. The church is situated at the corner of Selby and Virginia Streets. *Courtesy of Virginia Street Church Archives.*

## NOTES

1. Ruth Cutler, "Arnold-The Social Teacher," lectures/readings at Vassar College, 1910-1911, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society. Ruth Cutler was inspired by a professor who said, "We know that the only perfect freedom is, as our religion says, a service; not a service to any stock maxim, but as an elevation of our best self, and a harmonizing in subordination to this, and to the idea of perfecting humanity, all the multidimensions, turbulent, and fluid impulses of our ordinary selves."
2. Pam Fricke, interview by Johannes Allert, October 4, 2018. Edward Cutler was vice president of Noyes Bros. & Cutler. The St. Paul company was the largest pharmaceutical and medical supply company in the Upper Midwest.
3. Known today as the Virginia Street Church.
4. Ruth Cutler, daily activity book, 1916-1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
5. Ruth Cutler, photographs and albums, 1892-1917, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society. Photos of Edward and Ruth Cutler reveal a playful interaction. As an example, Edward once requested Ruth's assistance in building a garage at their summer home in Chatham. "I shocked the natives and tradespeople who came by at our gate that a woman (I did not feel such then) should be hammering, sawing, climbing a ladder and painting." Ruth Cutler, journal entry, October 26, 1916, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
6. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, March 13, 1917, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society. Ruth attended a talk at the Minnesota Club by Suffragist Beatrice Forbes-Robertson-Hale, who deplored extremists within the Suffrage movement and urged "for economic independence from the husband if they so desire."
7. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, October 29, 1916, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society. "I find myself suddenly conscious at meetings or gatherings of being aloof—a stranger wanting to take part but unable to break the barrier. What the barrier is I know not but there it is. It inhibits my impulses, it makes me seem, even to myself, cold and aloof when I could be of service."
8. Cutler, October 26, 1916.
9. Fricke, interview.
10. Vassar College was an all-women's school at the time.
11. Cutler, "Arnold-The Social Teacher."
12. Ruth Cutler, "Faculty Sketches," lectures/readings at Vassar College, 1910-1911, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
13. Cutler, "Faculty Sketches."
14. Ruth Cutler, undated diaries and journals, 1898-1912, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
15. Lyman J. Abbott was a lawyer turned American Congregationalist theologian from Massachusetts. He wrote prolifically about 'Social Gospel,' a popular movement that advocated for improving industrialized society through justice and charity. "Lyman Abbott," In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lyman-Abbott>.
16. Cutler, undated diaries and journals, 1898-1912.
17. Evidence in Ruth Cutler's diaries (Line-a-Day 1911-15) indicates an intimate relationship between Ruth and Helen Jackson existed. Pasted at the back of her diary is a poem by Auguste Angellier that eludes to "love that is not yet allowed." Underneath the poem is a faint monogram, 'H.J.'
18. Ruth Cutler, drawings and writings, 1903-1911, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
19. "Goodfellowship Club," Vassar Encyclopedia, 2004, accessed June 4, 2019, <http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/buildings-grounds/buildings/goodfellowship-club.html>.
20. Ruth Cutler mentions the 'Hostess House' in her journal. This could be a reference to a local YWCA Hostess House that served as a meeting place for members of the military and their families, or it could refer to the Maids Club House run by the Goodfellowship Club.
21. Ruth Cutler, maids club house, 1911-13, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
22. Examples pertaining to Ruth's attention to detail are found in her chronicling of the 1912 Presidential election (Box 2, Ruth Cutler and family papers). Additionally, MNHS possesses one of her graduate projects entitled, "Charity Organization And A Study Of Their Application in Minneapolis and St. Paul," (1914).
23. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, September 8, 1914, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
24. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, October 14, 1914, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
25. Randall T. Getchell, "The Historic Fight: The Struggle to Control St. Paul Charity," *Minnesota History* (Winter 2003-04): 394-395. Additionally, Ruth noted in her journal, "Sparks flew" and "Mr. J. crawled. L.W. Hill still rampant." Ruth Cutler, journal entry, November 14, 1914, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
26. Ruth Cutler, Line-A-Day notes, December 20, 1915, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society, "Fiendish Day at Office—Begun by Mr. Louis Hill's disturbing presence. Effort to maintain principles." Journaling on October 26, 1916, Ruth eludes to her resignation from United Charities the previous year.
27. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, February 15, 1916. Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
28. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, February 26, 1916, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
29. Cutler, February 26, 1916.
30. Cutler, October 26, 1916.
31. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, November 26, 1916, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
32. Cutler, November 26, 1916.
33. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, April 16, 1917, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

34. President Wilson asked Congress to declare war on April 2, 1917, and Congress did April 6.
35. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, May 14, 1917, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
36. "British Continue Gains In Flanders With Artillery—Germans Are Forced Back Across Steenbeck River," "Crack Guard Division Is Ordered To France," "U.S. To Call New Army Soon," *The Hector Mirror*, August 26, 1917, 2.
37. Ruth Cutler, diaries and journals, 1898-1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
38. Initially, Ft. Snelling was used as a training center for officers, complete with trenches. By the fall of 1917, it transitioned to Base Hospital 29.
39. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, October 28, 1917, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
40. Box 1, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society. Fatherless Children of France and War Orphans Literature. Included are thank you letters to Ruth from recipients of her generosity.
41. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, end of April 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
42. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, May 6, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
43. Mary Cutler Sergeant to Amelia Cutler and Elinor Cutler Thompson, condolences, recollections, and memorials upon Ruth's death 1918-19, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
44. Ray Cavanaugh, "The Surprising Story of World War I's Only Attack on U.S. Soil," *Time*, July 20, 2018, accessed August 1, 2018, <http://time.com/5343228/wwi-attack-cape-cod/>. Ruth Cutler, journal entries, July 21-22, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
45. "Richard Feldt," World War I U-Boat Commanders, accessed March 14, 2019, <https://uboat.net/wwi/men/commanders/69.html>.
46. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, July 22, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
47. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, August 27, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
48. Ruth Cutler, letter to Harold and Mary (Cutler) Sargent, Lindstrom, MN, August 29, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
49. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, August 31, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
50. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, November 1, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
51. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, November 9-11, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
52. The service was held outdoors because of the influenza pandemic.
53. Ruth Cutler, journal entry, November 12, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
54. Ruth Cutler, letter to Father and Amelia, November 19, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
55. Cutler, November 19, 1918.
56. Cutler, November 19, 1918.
57. Ruth Cutler, letter to Father and Amelia, November 21, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
58. Ruth Cutler, letter to Father and Amelia, November 23, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
59. Ruth Cutler, letters "at sea," November 28, 1918, and December 1, and in Liverpool on December 2, 1918. Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
60. Ruth Cutler, letters to Father and Amelia from Liverpool (Hotel Compton), December 2 and London, December 5, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
61. Ruth Cutler, letter from London, December 10, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
62. Ruth Cutler, letter from Paris, December 13, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
63. Ruth Cutler, letter about French National Holiday for Wilson from Paris, December 14, 1918, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
64. Thomas H. Conner, *War and Remembrance: The Story of the American Battle Monuments Commission* (Lexington: University Press Kentucky, 2018), 20-21.
65. United Charities, "Her Service Star Gleams Golden Now," *Our Work* VI, no. 1 (January 1, 1919): 3-4, Ruth Cutler collections, Minnesota Historical Society.
66. "Have you Gussed About Your Xmas Gifts And Ruth Cutler Funds?" *Vassar Chronicle* XI, no. 17 (March 6, 1954): 3, <https://newspaperarchives.vassar.edu/?a=d&d=vcchro19540306-01.2.25&> and "To Build a Recreational Hall," *Vassar Miscellany News* III, no. 8 (October 24, 1923): 1, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://newspaperarchives.vassar.edu/?a=d&d=miscellany19231024-01.2.3&srpos=4&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-Ruth+Cutler----->.
67. St. Paul Oakland Cemetery Association, internment records, St. Paul, MN.
68. "The Virginia Street Church (Swedenborgian)," Minnesota Historical Society, 1979.
69. Dane Smith, "God of Peace: Milles' 'Finest Creation in Stone,'" *Ramsey County History* 17, no. 1 (1981): 17-22.
70. Laura Spinney, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2017), 228-229.
71. Ruth Cutler, recipes and miscellaneous writings, Ruth Cutler and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

#### Notes to Sidebar on p. 29

- a. Pam Fricke, interview by Johannes Allert, October 2, 2018.
- b. "Who Was Emanuel Swedenborg?" Virginia Street Church (Swedenborgian), accessed May 1, 2019, <http://www.virginiastchurch.org/swedenborg-theology>.
- c. "The Virginia Street Church (Swedenborgian)," Minnesota Historical Society, 1979.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

*The mission statement of the Ramsey County Historical Society  
adopted by the Board of Directors on January 25, 2016.*

The Ramsey County Historical Society's vision is to be widely recognized as an innovator, leader, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, delivering inspiring history programming, and using local history in education. Our mission of *preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future* guides this vision.

The Society began in 1949 when a group of citizens acquired and preserved the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family had acquired in 1849. Following five years of restoration work, the Society opened the Gibbs Farm museum (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974). Originally programs focused on telling the story of the pioneer life of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, the historic site also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, building additional structures, and dedicating outdoor spaces to tell these stories. The remarkable relationship of Jane Gibbs with the Dakota during her childhood in the 1830s and again as an adult encouraged RCHS to expand its interpretation of the Gibbs farm to both pioneer and Dakota life.

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine, *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, an expanded commitment from Ramsey County enabled the organization to move its library, archives, and administrative offices to downtown St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An additional expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 to better serve the public and allow greater access to the Society's vast collection of historical archives and artifacts. In 2016, due to an endowment gift of \$1 million, the Research Center was rededicated as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers a wide variety of public programming for youth and adults. Please see [www.rchs.com](http://www.rchs.com) for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps at Gibbs Farm, and much more. RCHS is a trusted education partner serving 15,000 students annually on field trips or through outreach programs in schools that bring to life the Gibbs Family as well as the Dakota people of Cloud Man's village. These programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not yet a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

R.C.H.S.  
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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*Pathways to Dakota & Pioneer Life*  
Experience | Understand | Grow



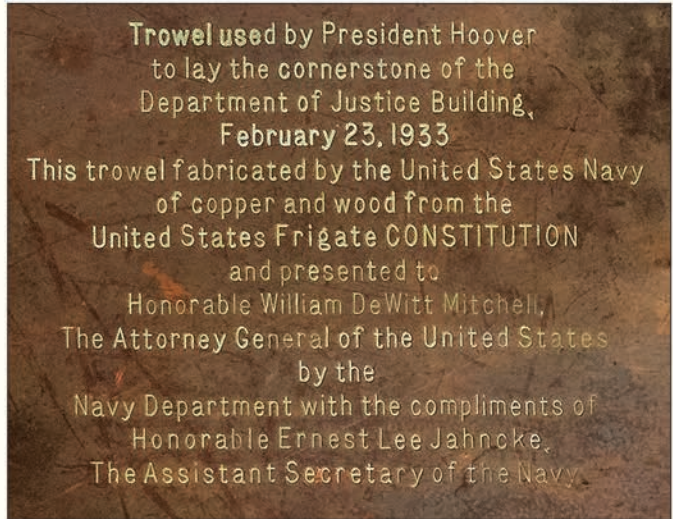
## The Tale of the Trowel

DOUGLAS R. HEIDENREICH

William DeWitt Mitchell was presented with a trowel upon leaving his post as United States Attorney General. President Hoover had used the trowel to lay the cornerstone of the new Department of Justice building in 1933.

The trowel was fashioned from wood and copper from the USS *Constitution*. That wooden sailing vessel earned the sobriquet “Old Ironsides” because of her refusal to sink or strike her colors during a great naval battle in the War of 1812.<sup>1</sup> Supposedly a British sailor aboard the ship with which the *Constitution* was engaged in battle exclaimed that her sides must be made of iron to withstand the fierce shelling to which she was being subjected.

Some years later, the *Constitution* was scheduled to be dismantled. Public opinion, however, influenced largely by the publication of the poem, “Old Ironsides,” prevented this. The stirring opening line, “Ay, tear her tattered ensign down,”<sup>2</sup> had struck a chord with the public. The author of that poem, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., became the father of the great US Supreme Court Justice, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. The frigate was at various times decommissioned, recommissioned, rebuilt, and used as a training vessel. The *Constitution*, open to visitors, remains in the Charlestown Navy Yard today,<sup>3</sup> a



Photographs by Bob Muschewske. Courtesy of William Mitchell School of Law Archives.

symbol of the days when America truly was “the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.”<sup>4</sup>

It is said that the copper that sheathed her hull, a bit of which was used to fashion this trowel, came from Paul Revere’s shop. The trowel today rests in the Mitchell Hamline School of Law Archives.

### NOTES

1. United States Navy, “USS Constitution,” in United States Navy Fact File, accessed July 12, 2019, [https://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact\\_display.asp?cid=4200&tid=100&ct=4](https://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=4200&tid=100&ct=4).
2. Oliver Wendell Holmes, “Old Ironsides,” accessed July 12, 2019, <http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/owh/oldiron.html>.
3. United States Navy, “USS Constitution,” in United States Navy Fact File, accessed July 12, 2019, [https://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact\\_display.asp?cid=4200&tid=100&ct=4](https://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=4200&tid=100&ct=4).
4. “The Star-Spangled Banner,” Smithsonian National Museum of American History, accessed July 12, 2019, <https://amhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/>.



## Facing Change: Advancing Museum Board Diversity & Inclusion

The Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) has been selected by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) to participate in “Facing Change: Advancing Museum Board Diversity & Inclusion.” This unprecedented national initiative to diversify museum boards and leadership is taking place across five US cities and includes a cross-section of museums.

With the support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Alice L. Walton Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, this program will provide the framework, training, and resources for museum leaders to build inclusive cultures within their institutions that more accurately reflect the communities they serve.

According to Chad Roberts, RCHS president, “Ramsey County Historical Society has been a trusted partner in preserving the history of the people and institutions in Ramsey County for seventy years. Enhancing our leadership to ensure inclusive representation of everybody who calls this community home is a strategic priority.

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St. Paulite Ruth Cutler on her graduation day at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1912. Her future was full of possibilities. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*